

SHEEP TRANSPORTATION

Code of practice
for
the transportation of sheep
in
Western Australia

ISBN 7307 6334 X

Published by the
Department of Local Government and Regional Development
Western Australia
March, 2003

PREFACE

The **Code of practice for the transportation of sheep in Western Australia** is based on the *CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE WELFARE OF ANIMALS sheep* produced by the Livestock Transporters Association of Western Australia (Inc). The original *Welfare Code* was based on an extensive Australia wide survey of all Codes of Practice and the technical and practical experience and knowledge of the Executive and members of the Association

This code has been prepared to assist all persons handling or transporting cattle in Western Australia, and reference to this code is made in Regulations provided under Section 25 of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* for the purposes of a defence against cruelty. It is not intended to be used for either audit or compliance purposes.

This Western Australian version of the code is supported by the livestock industries and the Department of Agriculture. It is based on current knowledge and technology. It will be reviewed in the future on a needs basis, to take account of advances in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour, technological changes in animal husbandry and their relationship to the welfare of animals.

For anyone using animals for scientific purposes, as defined in the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, this code should be read and used in conjunction with the “scientific use code”.

Further copies of this code are available from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development or from the internet at: <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au>

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Code of Practice is intended as a guide for people who are involved in transporting sheep. It emphasises the responsibilities of the owner of the sheep (or his/her agent) and drivers. It is intended to encourage considerate treatment so that transport stress and injury are minimised at all stages of the transport operation.

This Code should be read in conjunction with the *Code of practice for sheep in Western Australia*.

In this Code, transport includes the period immediately after mustering for loading including loading, transit, rest periods and unloading at the point of destination.

Employers have an obligation to train employees in humane handling, equipment use and livestock care, and ignorance is no excuse for inappropriate handling of sheep.

Unnecessary transport of sheep should be avoided, however any transport that is required should be carried out in a way that minimises stress, pain and suffering.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1

The possibility of animals being injured or becoming ill can be minimised by transporting them to their destination by the quickest, least stressful route, within the confines of any legal requirements.

2.2

The owner or manager is responsible for the sheep until they are on the transport vehicle. This includes the selection of only those sheep which are fit to travel. Once on the vehicle the sheep become the transporter's responsibility including loading density, until they are unloaded at the abattoir, knackery or other destination. If a driver considers that the sheep presented for transport are not likely to survive the journey or are not fit for transport, loading should be refused. After delivery, abattoir or knackery management (including service abattoirs), assumes responsibility until slaughter. When at saleyards, they are the responsibility of the saleyard superintendent. When at a second property, the owner/manager of that property is responsible.

2.3

Plans should be made to minimise any delay that could be stressful to sheep. The driver must ensure that he/she is provided with the name and telephone number of the owner/agent of the sheep.

2.4

Persons organising the transport of animals must be aware of any legislative requirements for health and welfare certification of the animals and ensure that approvals and documentation are completed before the planned journey. This is particularly important for interstate and export movements, and will minimise delays that may adversely affect the well-being of animals. Further information can be obtained through local offices of Agriculture or Primary Industry in each State.

2.5

If interstate crossing places have fixed times of operations, the journey should be planned to accommodate these times. Crossing-place inspectors should be advised of estimated times of arrival and, where practicable, of unforeseen delays.

2.6 Owner's Responsibilities

2.6.1 The owner or agent has a responsibility to select only sheep which are fit for travel.

2.6.2 The nature and duration of the proposed journey should be considered when determining the degree of fitness required.

2.6.3 The owner or agent is responsible for the provision of well maintained loading and holding facilities and the provision of competent people to load stock.

2.6.4 The owner or agent is responsible for the provision of a waybill with comprehensive details.

2.7 Driver's Responsibilities

2.7.1 The driver of a road vehicle is responsible for the care and welfare of the sheep during transport unless an attendant or agent appointed by the owner travels with the consignment. Drivers must stop and assist a distressed or injured animal immediately they become aware of a problem.

2.7.2 Drivers should be trained to ensure the welfare of sheep in their charge and be familiar with the contents of this Code of Practice.

3. POLLUTION

3.1 Exhaust Noise and Pollution

Truck exhaust systems must comply to E.P.A. and vehicle manufacturers standards.

3.2

Transport trailer lower floor should be enclosed over road wheels to minimise water entry which causes extreme stress to animals during adverse weather conditions.

4. MINIMISING STRESS

4.1

Environmental stressors may have cumulative effects on animals and result in severe physiological changes to an animal.

4.1.1 Mustering and assembling sheep for transport may cause stress. The most severely affected animals will be those unaccustomed to being handled, heavily pregnant ewes and sheep in poor condition.

4.1.2 Sheep brought to loading and handling facilities should be moved as quickly and as carefully as possible, so that their condition does not deteriorate during transport.

4.1.3 It is important that transporters realise that animals constrained by transport cannot seek shade or move away from cold drafts. The prevailing weather conditions may increase the stress caused by being transported.

4.1.4 Wherever possible, sheep destined for slaughter should be transported directly to slaughter to minimise the time off feed.

5. PRE-TRANSPORT PREPARATION OF SHEEP

5.1 Pre-Travel Rest Period

5.1.1 The duration of the required rest period depends on the fitness of the animals, the duration of the mustering, and the expected travelling period. A rest period before loading is beneficial and should be added to the pre-transport timetable of each of the following classes of sheep : -

- sheep mustered in extensive areas
- drought affected sheep
- ewes with lambs at foot
- sheep obviously stressed by mustering

5.1.2 This rest period should be at least 12 hours.

5.2 Pre-travel water and feed requirements

Sheep mustered from pastoral country by helicopter or light plane into unfamiliar conditions, e.g. exposed to an unaccustomed level of contact with man, dogs, motor vehicles etc. must be provided with 24 hours of feed, water and rest before loading for transport.

5.3 Water and Feed Requirements

5.3.1 Prolonged deprivation of feed and water may compound the stress associated with transportation and possibly result in metabolic disturbances or an increase in the number of pathogenic organisms in the gut. There is also a fundamental need to fast sheep to allow them to "empty out" prior to transport. A balanced compromise between these two requirements must be met with due consideration for the physiological state (dry, pregnant, lactating, young, mature) of the sheep being transported.

5.3.2 Feed and clean water must be provided between mustering and loading if:

- sheep are to remain in the yards for more than 24 hours; or
- sheep to travel for 24 hours or more; or
- the combined yarding and travel time is to be more than 24 hours; or
- either of the conditions in 4.1.1 apply.

5.3.3 This feed and water should be available for a minimum of 4 hours and should then be withdrawn for at least 8 hours.

5.3.4 Water should be provided in troughs so that all ages and classes of animals can drink. Careful note must be taken of animals which have watered previously on bore drains. They will not be used to troughs. Adults require a minimum of 4 litres (1 gallon) /head/day. In extremely hot weather these amounts should be doubled.

5.3.5 Suitable food is 0.5 kg of palatable dry roughage per adult animal per day.

5.4 Selection of sheep which are fit to travel

5.4.1 Only sheep which are fit to travel should be selected for transport. Those most susceptible to disease, stress or injury during transport must be loaded last and unloaded first.

5.4.2 Ewes more than four months pregnant will not be transported unless it is absolutely unavoidable and they must be offered food and water on arrival.

5.4.3 Lambs less than 14 kg. liveweight will not be transported unless it is unavoidable, and special care must be taken.

5.4.4 Lambs and newly shorn sheep (up to two weeks off shears) are particularly susceptible to wind chill and should be transported in vehicles that provide substantial protection from unfavourable weather.

5.5 General exceptions to selection of fit sheep

In the following circumstances, it may be necessary to transport sheep that otherwise would be unfit to travel: -

5.5.1 Sheep that are either ill or injured may be transported for veterinary treatment.

5.5.2 Sheep may be transported a short distance to a place for emergency humane destruction, for example, following injury.

5.5.3 Weak animals may be transported as a salvage operation, for example from a drought area.

5.6 Sheep Injured by Bushfire

5.6.1 After bushfires, sheep assessed by a veterinary surgeon or livestock assessment team as capable of travelling without undue pain or stress resulting from burns, may be transported elsewhere.

5.6.2 In the absence of a veterinary surgeon or livestock assessment team bushfire affected sheep should only be transported for agistment or slaughter if they meet all of the following criteria.

- they do not show severe respiratory distress they are able to walk unassisted
- they do not have large areas of burnt bare skin or have fly strike on burnt areas

5.6.3 Animals that do not meet all of the above criteria must be humanely destroyed without delay.

5.7 Drought Affected Sheep

5.7.1 Under no circumstances should sheep be allowed to become so weak that they are not fit to travel. Animals that go down after limited exercise are not fit to travel. They should be fed until they are strong enough to travel, or promptly and humanely destroyed. They should not be consigned through saleyards.

5.7.2 Only animals judged to be able to survive the journey should be transported.

5.7.3 Weakened sheep should be transported to their destination by the quickest, least stressful route. They should be given special protection against exposure to extremes of weather. They should not be mixed with strong animals.

5.8 Handling Sheep Rejected From Transport

5.8.1 Animals that are suffering should be promptly and humanely destroyed. Methods of humane euthanasia are provided later in Section 11 of this Code.

5.8.2 Humane and effective arrangements should be made by the owner or agent for the handling and care of any animal rejected as unsuitable for loading.

6. LOADING

6.1 Supervision

6.1.1 Loading and unloading are the activities during which injuries and stress are most likely to occur.

6.1.2 The loading procedure should be planned well in advance to allow adequate time for all animals to be loaded quietly and with care. They should be loaded in a way that is not liable to cause them injury.

6.1.3 Loading should be supervised by experienced stock handlers. Persons responsible for the transport of sheep should have a basic knowledge of the behavioural and physical needs of sheep.

6.1.4 Supervisors should ensure that spectators do not impede the smooth loading of sheep.

6.1.5 Sheep must not be lifted off the ground by the head, horns, legs or wool during loading or unloading

6.2 Cleanliness

6.2.1 Sheep should only be loaded on to vehicles that have been thoroughly cleaned.

6.2.2 Appropriate construction methods should be used to prevent the soiling of animals on the lower deck of a multi- deck transport.

6.3 Facilities

6.3.1 Loading should only take place from a properly constructed ramp or loading bay suitable for sheep.

6.3.2 Ramps and walking surfaces should have an anti-slip design with foot battens as necessary. Ramps should be 450-500 mm wide to prevent jamming. A flat area or platform at least 1 metre in length, and ramp steps with 250 mm treads and 50 mm risers or cross cleats 25 mm deep at 200 mm centres, is recommended. A slope of not more than 1 in 3 (about 20 degrees) is recommended for permanently installed ramps.

6.3.3 Side protection should be railings of sufficient height and sufficiently closed at the bottom to prevent injuries.

6.3.4 There should be no protrusions or sharp edges capable of injuring animals on the framework, doorways, floors or partitions. Hinges and latches must not project into the pathway of animals.

6.3.5 Gates should operate smoothly, retract fully from the pathway of animals and not be susceptible to jamming. Gates when shut should also be made clearly visible to animals. This can be helped by providing, a "sight board" to improve visibility.

6.3.6 During loading the gate of a stock crate must be properly aligned with the loading ramp to ensure minimal injury to, and the smooth movement of animals. Filler boards or preferably flaps must be used to cover any gap between the loading ramp and the floor of the stock crate.

6.3.7 Provision of a walkway outside the ramp for use by an attendant will facilitate stock movement.

6.4 Lighting

6.4.1 Artificial lighting must be available for loading and unloading at night. Such lighting should be carefully positioned to give even light over ramps, races, yards and inside the transport vehicle.

6.5 Segregation During Transport

6.5.1 The following classes of stock should where practical be transported and penned separately

- sheep that differ greatly in size
- ewes that are more than four months pregnant
- rams

6.5.2 Sheep must not be mixed with other animal species during transport. It is undesirable to mix goats and sheep in the one consignment unless they have had previous contact with each other.

6.5.3 Working dogs must not be transported in the stock crate with sheep. Dogs should be transported out of sight of stock, either in the vehicle cabin or in a suitably designed and ventilated kennel elsewhere on the vehicle.

6.6 Assisting Loading

6.6.1 Loading is facilitated by using the behavioural characteristics of sheep by which they will follow one another along a corridor or ramp. Movement is assisted by covering the sides of races and ramps and by using curved laneways. Sheep are difficult to move unless they can see somewhere to go.

6.6.2 Electric prods should be powered only by battery and their use restricted to the amount necessary to complete both loading and unloading.

6.6.3 Metallic rattles are ideal in that they encourage movement in response to sound. Sticks, lengths of plastic or metal piping or heavy leather belts must not be used to strike sheep to get them to move.

6.6.4 The use of well-trained dogs to help with the loading of sheep is acceptable but all dogs must be muzzled at all times. The number of dogs used should be limited to the minimum necessary to complete the task. The muzzle must allow the dogs to drink and cause no discomfort.

7. TRANSPORT DESIGN

7.1 Construction and Design

7.1.1. Vehicles and their fittings must be strong enough to contain the animal and prevent their escape.

7.1.2 Materials used in the construction of transport vehicles must be able to be cleaned effectively.

7.1.3 Internal sheeting of the sides of stock crates should be smooth to eliminate pressure points and reduce bruising.

7.1.4 The stock crate should be free of obstructions and hazards that could cause injury. Doors should be at least 500 mm wide to allow easy entry and exit.

7.1.5 The floor should be constructed from a non-slip material that will not injure the legs or hooves of animals. The floor of multi-deck transports should be constructed in such a way as to prevent the soiling of animals on lower decks.

7.1.6 Side rails should be spaced at 150 mm intervals to prevent the heads and limit the chance of legs of animals protruding between them.

7.1.7 The space between decks should be sufficient for sheep to stand in their natural position without contacting overhead structures.

7.1.8 Pen partitions prevent overcrowding, surging, reduce injuries, and assist in the support of animals. Pen lengths should ideally be 2.5m and not exceed 3m.

7.1.9 Where multi-deck loading/unloading is available loading should occur directly onto and off the upper decks via side or rear gates on that deck.

7.1.10 Vehicles should be serviced and maintained regularly to minimise breakdowns.

7.2 Ventilation

The exhaust system of a vehicle must not pollute the air inside the transport.

8. LOADING DENSITY DURING TRANSPORT

8.1

The owner or loading agent is responsible for ensuring that the loading density and penning arrangements are compatible with the welfare of the sheep and the capacity of the transport vehicle. The driver may refuse to move the transport vehicle unless the above conditions are complied with, in which case it will be the responsibility of the owner or loading agent to adjust or reload accordingly.

8.2

The density of loading should be determined by the need to minimise injury but allow fallen animals to rise without assistance.

8.3

Loading sheep either too loosely or too tightly predisposes them to injury. The loading density of stock must be assessed for each division in a stock crate.

Table of recommended loadine

densities	for	sheen	on	a	2.5m	wide
	Average Weight (kg)	Floor area (sq. m/head)			Number of head per 12.2m (40 ft. deck)	
	20	0.17			170	
	30	0.19			50	
	40	0.22			130	
	50	0.27			110	
tray	60	0.29			100	

8.4

Calculations of the above sheep numbers have been based on animals in half-wool. When transporting full-wool sheep the number should be reduced accordingly.

9. TRAVEL

9.1 General

9.1.1 Providing care is taken in planning a journey and the facilities provided are of a high standard, sheep aged over 12 months can be transported without spelling for up to 24 hours without any problems; however animals should be inspected regularly during transit. For weaned sheep less than 12 months, the relevant time period is 12 hours. This time period includes loading and unloading and stops when the animals are not unloaded.

9.1.2 The 24 hour transport period for mature sheep may be extended to 30 hours if, and only if, the entire journey can be completed within this time. For young sheep, the 12 hours period may be extended to 18 hours.

9.1.3 Travel should be completed as soon as possible. If delays occur, adequate feed, water and ventilation and protection from extreme weather must be provided.

9.1.4 Drivers should drive as smoothly as possible to prevent injuries and animals being thrown off their feet.

9.1.5 Distressed or injured animals must be assisted by the driver. Every effort should be made to get fallen animals to their feet.

9.1.6 Veterinary, police, RSPCA or other authorised Agriculture WA or Primary Industries' assistance should be sought as soon as possible to deal with severely distressed or injured sheep. If necessary injured or ill animals should be humanely killed by the driver without delay and according to the recommendations described in Section 11 of this Code.

9.2 Temperature

Transporting sheep in very hot or cold weather should be avoided where possible. It is advisable when planning a journey that may take place during bad weather to pay careful attention to the ventilation of the transport unit, the speed of travel, the number of planned stops as well as the number, age and condition of the animals being carried. Particular care should be taken with recently shorn sheep in wet cold weather.

9.3 In-Transit Inspections

9.3.1 All consignments should be inspected within 30-60 minutes of commencing a journey. Road consignments should be checked at least every three hours, or whenever the driver has a rest stop.

9.3.2 A suitable source of lighting must be available to carry out inspections at night and should be provided by the person in charge.

10. REST PERIODS, FEED AND WATER DURING TRANSPORT

10.1 Travel Times and Rest Times

10.1.1 Rest stops extend the total time of a journey. Unloading and loading animals for rest stops and subjecting them to unfamiliar surroundings may impose a greater stress than continuing the journey for a limited period.

However prolonged deprivation of feed and water may compound stress associated with transportation and possibly result in metabolic disturbances or an increase in the number of pathogenic organisms in the gut.

10.1.2 Any one journey should not exceed 24 hours, unless the entire journey can be completed within 30 hours.

10.1.3 After each 24 hours of travel adult sheep should have a rest period of at least 12 hours unless 9.1.2 applies.

10.1.4 Animals between weaning and twelve months of age require a rest period of at least 12 hours after every 18 hours of transport.

10.2 Feed and Water Requirements

10.2.1 During every specified rest period, sheep of all ages must –

- be unloaded
- have access to food and clean water (except during the last 8 hours before reloading;
- have enough space for exercise and rest.

10.2.2 Water and feed must be provided at least once in every 24 hours to animals older than 12 months - the only exception is animals travelling on a journey which will be entirely completed in 30 hours.

10.2.3 Care should be taken so that sheep are not deprived of feed and water beyond the limits specified above, when a journey is broken by unloading and spelling, such as occurs at a saleyard en route to an abattoir. The relevant period for determining feed and water requirement is the total period of deprivation of feed and water from the time of initial loading until unloading after the second or last journey.

11. UNLOADING

11.1

Requirements similar to those listed under "Loading" apply to the unloading of sheep but it must be recognised they will be tired after a journey.

11.2

Sheep should be unloaded promptly on arrival at the destination. Injuries will be reduced if they are given the opportunity to walk quietly off the vehicle.

11.3 Responsibilities

11.3.1 The driver must bring to the attention of the person in charge at the destination, any aspect of the journey that might affect the future health or welfare of the animals. This includes the last feeding and watering times and full details of any treatment given.

11.3.2 Persons in charge of the consignment must notify and transfer responsibility for the stock to a suitable person at their destination.

11.4 Access to Feed and Water

All sheep must be given access to water as soon as they are unloaded.. Feed should be provided to sheep which have just travelled for more than 16 hours (and thus not been fed for 24 hours) or sheep which will be yarded for more than 24 hours. The only exception is that feed should not be provided to animals which will be slaughtered within the next 8 hours.

11.5 Injured Animals

11.5.1 There should be facilities for the humane unloading and slaughter of animals that are unable to walk off a vehicle because of injury or exhaustion.

11.5.2 Severely injured animals must be humanely killed without delay. If a veterinarian is unavailable, this should be done by, or at the direction of, the person in charge at the time. It is unacceptable to delay killing severely injured animals for any length of time.

11.5.3 Animals requiring emergency slaughter should be shot or stunned and bled without moving them further than is necessary to effect euthanasia. This may be on the transport vehicle. (stunned only)

12. EMERGENCY EUTHANASIA OF SHEEP

12.1

Previous sections of this Code have drawn attention to circumstances in which sheep may need to be humanely killed.

12.2

Where euthanasia is necessary, the person responsible for the animals must ensure it is carried out humanely and results in immediate death. Assistance may be sought from a veterinary practitioner, the RSPCA authorised officer from Agriculture WA or Primary Industries, or the police if necessary.

12.3

Euthanasia of animals is an unpleasant experience for most people and spectators should be actively discouraged from viewing the destruction of injured animals.

12.4

The animal should be handled quietly beforehand to ensure it is not unnecessarily distressed or alarmed.

12.5 Use of Firearms

12.5.1 The most efficient, safe and widely available method of humanely destroying sheep during transport is to shoot the animal through the brain at close range.

Safe Use of Firearms

- .22 calibre rifle or a .32 calibre humane killer pistol is adequate for humane euthanasia of most sheep.
- Any use of firearms is potentially hazardous.
- Persons other than the marksman and a handler for the animal should be cleared from the area or should stand well behind the marksman.
- Never fire while the animal is moving its head. Wait patiently for a quiet interval before firing.
- To provide maximum impact and the least possibility of misdirection, the gun should be fired at point blank range but not in contact with the animal's head.

12.6 Use of Captive Bolt Pistol

12.6.1 When used with care this alternative is safer than use of a firearm.

12.6.2 The operator does not have to be an experienced marksman. However the instrument's muzzle must be accurately positioned on the skull as depicted in Figures, 1, 2 and 3. It must be firmly pressed against the skull before firing.

12.6.3 A captive-bolt pistol only stuns the animal and it is necessary to bleed out the animal to ensure death.

12.6.4 Blank cartridges for the captive-bolt pistol are colour coded according to the amount of charge they contain, and the manufacturer's recommendations should be followed on the most appropriate blank cartridges for different farm animals.

12.6.5 Regular maintenance of the captive-bolt pistol is essential for efficient stunning and avoidance of malfunctions.

Hornless sheep and rams:

Using a firearm or captive-bolt pistol: the instrument is directed at the top of the head. The firearm is aimed towards the gullet. Alternatively, the instrument may be placed just behind the poll and aimed in the direction of the animal's muzzle. Both methods are illustrated in Figure 1



Figure 1. Recommended position and direction of fire for captive-bolt pistol or firearm - hornless sheep and rams

Horned sheep and rams

Using a captive-bolt: the top of the head position may not be suitable, in which case the instrument may be placed behind the poll and aimed in the direction of the animal's muzzle (Figure 2.)



Figure 2. Recommended position and direction of fire for captive-bolt pistol - horned sheep and rams

Using a firearm: shoot at a point in the middle of the face just above the level of the eyes whilst aiming toward the spine as shown in Figure 3. The head may be steadied by an assistant who keeps out of the line of fire.



Figure 3 Recommended position and direction of fire for firearm - horned sheep and rams

Clubbing

Lambs (but not adults) may be stunned by a heavy blow to the back of the head to render them unconscious. This method of stunning lambs must only be used by those expert in the technique and must be followed immediately by bleeding out

Bleeding-out of sheep without pre-stunning

- Bleeding-out of sheep without pre-stunning is a humane alternative emergency method of slaughter provided it is done by a skilled person using a suitable, sharp knife.
- The animal should be laid on its side and the head drawn back. The neck is quickly cut transversely completely through to the spine just behind the jaw bone.
- As the animal will remain conscious for a few seconds attempts to sever the spinal cord or dislocate the neck are not recommended.